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EDITORIAL

Not a Grand Union

GU Markets, we hardly knew ye. Only a few short months after replacing the A&P, Grand Union is checking out of Duxbury permanently.

We'd be lying if we said we'd miss them.

Many of the Duxbury residents who do their grocery shopping out of town were ready to give the new supermarket a second look. A window of opportunity was open. There was actually some anticipation and, yes, even buzz about the new store.

Let's face it, this location could be a gold mine – a great demographic, lots of demand, a central spot right in town, plenty of complementary businesses nearby. The folks at Grand Union capitalized on all this by doing....nothing. If it is possible, the store has actually gotten worse since GU Markets took over.

Perhaps that was their strategy all along. Perhaps we are the victim of some kind of corporate tax write-off or divestiture. Maybe Duxbury was the proverbial bucket of baseballs in the A&P-Grand Union trade.

If so, it's too bad they never told their poor sign-maker who was still battling the Duxbury Zoning Board of Appeals over their outdoor sign, all the while going-out-of business signs were going up inside the store.

In the final analysis it should come as no surprise that neither A&P nor Grand Union could prosper – or even survive – in their current location. In this day and age we expect our supermarkets to be truly super. The shelf life for a mediocre, mid-sized, under-staffed market with lackluster selection is about as long as a carton of eggs.

In its salad-bar days, the A&P was a destination supermarket with wide gleaming aisles brimming with every kind of foodstuff. If you can remember those days then you will also remember Sweetsers Market in Snug Harbor. Regrettably, time passed them both by.

That's not to say that a supermarket cannot succeed in the A&P Plaza. (Do we still call it that?) There are plenty of examples of specialty markets that work in such locations. No doubt a niche market like Trader Joe's, Roche Brothers, the Fruit Center, or even an expanded version of The Gourmet's Pantry in Snug Harbor would prosper here.

So what's a Duxbury shopper to do? We could resign ourselves to whatever store decides to lease the space and hope we don't stuck with a Wal-Mart clone or some other evil big-box retail chain. Or we can proactively seek out a new market to anchor our town center and keep shopping dollars in Duxbury. (Look north if you wish to see a cautionary tale about the vibrancy of a town center.)

In Plymouth County, a surprising 29 percent of the supermarkets are independently operated. That means there are plenty of candidates out there for a would-be crusader.

If you'd like to learn more about the local supermarket scene, check out the Pembroke-based Griffin Report (www.griffinreport.com), a leading supermarket trade publication, or the the Mass. Food Association (www.ma.food.com).